

DEFICIT CRISIS

(Mr. BURGESS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, our country is facing a crisis. I'm not talking about the made-for-TV crisis that's going on right now over the fiscal cliff. I'm talking about the deficit.

The national debt now stands at \$16 trillion. At the end of this President's next term it will be close to \$22 trillion. Both parties bear the blame for this. Both branches of the legislative branch bear the responsibility, multiple administrations. And just as everyone was involved in the creation of this problem, we need all hands on deck for a solution. But unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be so.

Mr. Speaker, growth is critical. The last quarter of this year likely will see growth at 1.2 to 1.3 percent. That's not going to cut it. As long as we continue to push a tax policy that punishes success rather than provides for a pro-growth strategy, we will never grow our way out of this problem.

And then on the spending side, when are we going to have the open congressional hearings where we focus on the waste, the favoritism, the duplication that occurs in our Federal agencies? It's far past time for us to focus on those areas and allow the public in and allow the public to see how their money is being spent.

Failure to act on the deficit will likely rend the very fabric of our Republic. I, for one, do not want to see that happen.

FISCAL CLIFF

(Mr. ALTMIRE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. ALTMIRE. Recent reports have said this Congress is the most unproductive in modern times. Those studies compare the number of rollcall votes and bills passed to previous sessions. But the most important comparison is whether each Congress rose to the challenges they faced and were able to do big things on behalf of their constituents and the country. By that measure, there truly is no comparison.

Whether or not you supported the actions of previous Congresses, there can be no doubt that those congressional leaders took bold and decisive action to address crises both imminent and still to come. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said—yet—for this Congress, which has to this point failed to address a fiscal cliff that could easily be avoided before the clock strikes midnight tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, there is still time to change the way history will judge the action—or inaction—of this Congress. With crisis comes opportunity. We still have time to finish the job, so let's not squander this opportunity to remove this Congress from the ranks of the most infamous in history.

A TRIBUTE TO A GREAT AMERICAN, MIKE COATS

(Mr. OLSON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. OLSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today wearing my space shuttle tie to honor my hero, my friend, Mike Coats. Tomorrow, Mike is retiring as Director of the Johnson Space Center of Houston.

Mike and I have a few things in common. We both are naval aviators who love Coach Bill Krueger and Clear Lake High School basketball. But Mike has done things I only dream of. He logged over 463 hours in space on three space shuttle missions. Most importantly, he fought to keep the Johnson Space Center the home of U.S. dominance in human spaceflight despite the retirement of the space shuttle and the cancellation of the Constellation program. When I grow up, I want to be Mike Coats.

Bravo Zulu, Mike. May you, Diane, your daughter, your son, and those two beautiful granddaughters, those twins, always have fair winds and following seas.

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WE NEED A SHARED CONCERN FOR AMERICA

(Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas. Thank you for these words. I share a desire to serve the Nation in this pivotal time.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is enormously important that, as Starbucks said, we "come together." And we can do so. We can do it in a rationality that takes a simple analysis. A simple analysis says that if I like a bag of potato chips, that's a luxury item, I can run in and get it. I don't have to think about it. Its cost is manageable. If I want to go in and get a high-end Cadillac, I'll think about it for a couple of days.

That should be the thought process for this fiscal cliff. Pass the \$250,000 that will give 99 percent of Americans a tax break. Protect those who are unemployed who have worked and provide for their unemployment insurance. Protect those with the AMT—30 million taxpayers will fall over the cliff if we don't fix that, 222,000 Texans. And then if we have to deal with looking at how we address the question of reforming those benefits of Americans who work like Medicare and Social Security, we can do so. But I join the AARP, I join senior citizens: Leave Social Security alone. The changed CPI will not work, and that is not a time to deal with it in these waning hours.

We, Republicans, created this quagmire with the sequestration. We need to go and be able to address the immediacy. Get your bag of potato chips, cut the taxes for 99 percent of the American people and protect the unemployed.

We can do this. We don't have to go over the fiscal cliff. A shared concern for America, that's what we need today.

MIDDLE CLASS TAX CUTS

(Ms. MCCOLLUM asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, this Republican-controlled House has less than 36 hours to pass an extension of middle class tax cuts. Count me in as a "yes" vote right now to protect 98 percent of taxpayers from a tax increase. There should be bipartisan support to protect middle class families from higher taxes as our economy recovers.

So I sincerely hope that this Republican House is not so broken, so dysfunctional, and so out of touch with the real lives of Americans that the majority simply refuses to stand with Democrats to immediately pass an extension of the middle class tax cuts.

Yes, the top negotiations on other fiscal cliff issues must continue, but, Mr. Speaker, do not deny this Congress the opportunity to vote on a clean bill protecting middle class Americans. Let's start the new year by passing a commonsense, bipartisan extension of the middle class tax cuts and show America that Congress still works.

INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING

(Mr. CURSON of Michigan asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CURSON of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, more than 12 million Americans are still searching for work. The fiscal cliff and deficit reduction are important for our Nation's economic health in the long term, but we need to remember in the short term, we need job creation to get the economy moving again. We can do that by investing in our Nation's infrastructure.

By investing in our infrastructure, we put people to work and create revenue immediately. More people working lessens the strain on unemployment and family assistance programs and generates more employed persons paying taxes. Putting people back to work is a deficit-reduction plan.

The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that \$1 billion in highway investments can create nearly 28,000 well-paying construction jobs. Because infrastructure investment is not only a huge boost to the economy, it's critically needed. Historically, the issue has had bipartisan support because it's so critically important. If you need to get to the other side of a bridge, it doesn't matter if you're a Republican or a Democrat, you need to get to the other side.

Now is the time for America to invest in maintaining and upgrading our infrastructure. Let's put America back to work.